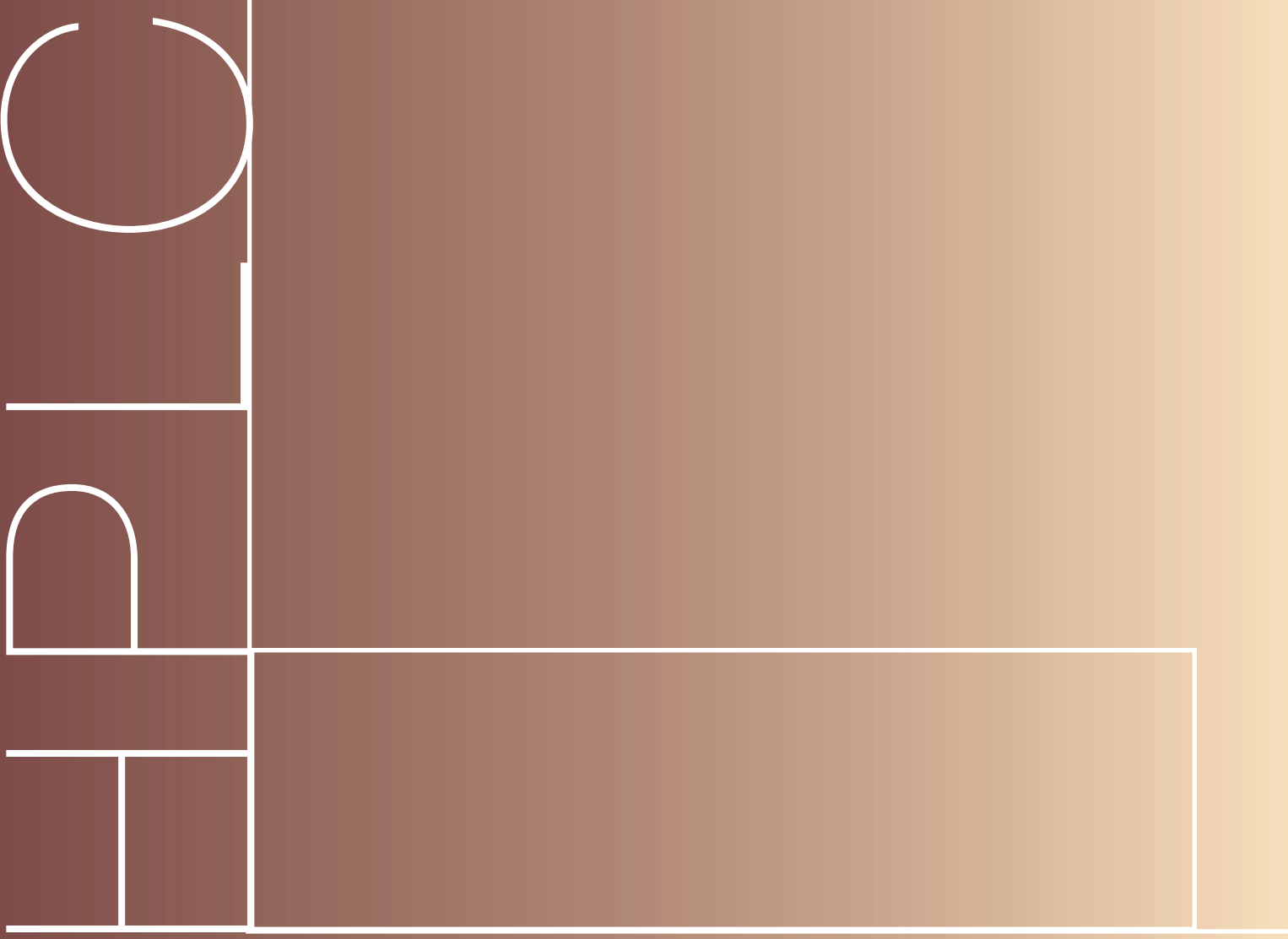

Creating High Performing and Equitable Schools

HPLC Project: Building the Capacity of Schools Serving Low-income Students to Develop and Implement High Performance Learning Communities

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, OERI

Building Implementation Capacity for Continuous Improvement

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PREFACE

The High Performance Learning Communities (HPLC) Project is a five-year project funded in October 1996 by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Education Research and Improvement (OERI). Its purpose is to develop, test, and replicate strategies that can help schools in high poverty areas improve to the point of becoming high performing.

Research about exemplary schools has demonstrated that some schools serving low-income students have had exceptional success, providing a knowledge base on "what works." However, the dissemination and translation of "what works" into the comprehensive reform of schools on a large scale has not happened. The HPLC Project speaks to this issue. It has distilled research about effective schools into succinct statements that describe "High Performance Learning Communities"—the HPLC Principles.

With the Principles as the framework for reform, the Project has worked with a network of 18 to 30 schools serving low-income students in California and Oregon to develop strategies that enable them and other schools to become High Performance Learning Communities. The project's research describes how these principles are implemented under different conditions and identifies support strategies (including practitioner tools, procedures, and materials) that facilitate starting, implementing and maintaining High Performance Learning Communities.

This report, *Building Implementation Capacity for Continuous Improvement*, is one of a series of reports that identifies critical issues in school reform and offers the HPLC approach and repertoire of strategies for addressing them. For more information, contact RPP International at (510) 450 –2550 or check the following websites:

http://www.rppintl.com/hplc/index.htm
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/hplc.html

RPP International directs the HPLC Project. Two organizations collaborated as full partners in the first three years of the contract, the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools led by Steve Jubb and California Tomorrow led by Laurie Olsen. They contributed greatly to the formulation and development of the HPLC approach in terms of its concepts, support strategies, and practical tools and materials. We wish to thank them for their inspiration and hard work. Throughout the contract, the schools in the HPLC network have been close collaborators and colleagues. The relationship of so many committed practitioners with our team of researchers and support providers has been one of mutual learning and respect. Whatever valuable lessons for the improvement of education may flow from the Project are the direct result of our participation together.

The authors wish to thank members of the HPLC research and support team that did the intense and demanding support work and meticulous documentation upon which this report rests. Sofia Aburto, David Chambliss, John Ericson, Cheryl Fields-Tyler, Velma Guillory-Talyor, Nancy Kamprath, Shelly King, Akili Moses, Rebecca Perry, Shirley Rogers, Debi Silverman, Haleh Sprehe, Victoria Thorp, and Aurora Wood put in long hours and demonstrated time and again their commitment to helping schools in poverty areas reach for excellence.

I. The HPLC Focus on Implementation

Research has shown that while most low-income students have not achieved at a high level, they have had exceptional success in *some* schools. Researchers have studied these exemplary schools and identified common characteristics across them (Berman, Minicucci, McLaughlin, Nelson, & Woodworth, 1995; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rose, 1995; Rossi & Stringfield, 1995; Waxman, Walker De Felix, & Anderson, 1992). In general terms, these characteristics fall into five areas. High performing schools share a vision of excellence and equity, they develop a challenging curriculum with high expectations for all students and instruction that engages students to reach for excellence, they organize students and time to afford quality learning opportunities for staff and students alike, they create a collaborative school culture that enables the school to be a community of learners, and they actively involve parents and community in student learning (Berman, Ericson, Aburto, Lashaw, & Thompson, 1998). We use the term *High Performance Learning Community (HPLC)* to signify the organizational essence of a school that displays these characteristics.

While research provides promising examples of high performing schools from which various reform models have been formulated, the literature also provides substantial evidence that reforms are not being replicated effectively on a broad scale. Furthermore, research suggests that students in low-income communities have benefited the least from school reform efforts to date (Gandara, 1994; Little & Dorph, 1998; Olsen, 1994). The field thus knows much about the characteristics of high performing schools, but little about how to create more of them, particularly in low-income settings.

Why? A central part of the problem is implementation. Whatever reform is tried, it must be implemented, and implementation requires adapting a reform to the particular context of each school. Furthermore, as an interactive process, implementation seldom follows a linear path, regardless of the plans laid out by designers of reform. Therein lies the challenge. Implementation is a non-linear process that is highly context-specific, requiring the reform to be adapted by those who best know the context—teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community partners (Fields-Tyler & Berman, 1999). Learning to implement change is therefore an exceedingly complex process. No wonder practitioners have a hard time with comprehensive reform.

The HPLC Project has taken on the challenge of developing a repertoire of effective strategies to help schools learn how to implement comprehensive reform, particularly as implementation challenges are presented in schools serving low-income students. The Project's research and action approach is built on the assumption that no one model will work in all contexts. Rather, we have identified and developed a repertoire of strategies that will enable schools to manage and adapt to the shifting conditions they face over time while educating all of their students to high academic standards (Berman, Fields-Tyler, Chambliss, Geiser, Olsen, Woodlief, & Wood, 1999).

The report identifies those implementation challenges that must be addressed as schools attempt comprehensive reform. Working with our HPLC Consortium of schools in California and Oregon, the Project developed support strategies to build the *capacity* of schools to implement change. Such capacity is not about carrying out one specific project. Implementation capacity consists of the skills, habits of mind, and organizational culture needed to consistently and effectively bring about improvement on an ongoing basis—a process we call *continuous improvement*. The report explains the characteristics of implementation

capacity and describes tools and processes that the Project has used with the HPLC Consortium schools to build implementation capacity.

II. Essential Challenges of Implementation

In a previous report, the Project reported that while almost all the HPLC Consortium schools had been engaged in numerous practices commonly associated with "reform," most were not experiencing the promise of those reforms to affect measurable changes in student achievement (Berman, Fields-Tyler, Chambliss, Geiser, Olsen, Woodlief, & Wood, 1999). The report explained that the schools often ran into a host of problems that interrupted or completely disabled their efforts to improve. In short, they often had difficulty fully and consistently implementing their reforms in ways that accomplished goals of excellence and equity.

In light of this evidence, the Project refined its focus on supporting and understanding the work of implementation. We observed that Consortium schools making efforts to implement systemic change run into challenges in five areas. Since the inability to resolve challenges in any one of these areas generally results in a less than successful effort, we call them *essential challenges of implementation.*

Though we will discuss and illustrate each element in turn, implementation is emphatically dynamic and non-linear. It consists of adapting, learning, adjusting, and moving forward on many fronts at once.[1] At any time, one or more of the implementation challenges may be salient, depending on distinctly local situations. Frequently, however, implementation requires concurrent attention to multiple challenges.

Challenge 1: Getting Buy-In

In order to be able to implement complex change, the champions of a reform strategy have to gain the support of at least a critical mass of key players who can articulate, advocate for, and actualize the ideas underlying the reform as well as the strategies associated with the reform. Identifying which players are key is very context-specific. They often include, but are not limited to administrators, teachers, students, school board members, district officials, parents, or community groups.

For example, a small team from one of the Consortium's elementary schools reflected on its student achievement challenges, and identified what they felt would be a key strategy for improving learning and achievement: aligning curriculum and standards. The team did not, however, think through how it would engage the rest of the staff in understanding how this strategy would improve student learning and achievement—they did not develop a plan for getting buy-in to this idea. Nor did they plan to develop a shared picture of what it would look like if the curriculum and standards were aligned. Instead, the team essentially "told" the rest of the staff that they were going to work on alignment. The staff did not know where to begin. Everyone was soon frustrated—and practices were not changing. This is an example of how buy-in not only to the *idea* behind the change, but also to the *vision* of the results of the change is an essential aspect of effective implementation.

Challenge 2: Comprehensive Planning with Detailed Follow-through

Effective implementation of comprehensive reform requires a plan that contains the details that people need to make decisions about time, attention, collaboration, and resources—an action plan. The action plan needs to be grounded in the whole-school context and firmly linked to the ultimate goals of the reform, which for High Performance Learning Communities is high student achievement and equity.

Many schools plan a particular program or curriculum and fail to account for the relationship between the proposed program and its interactions with the ongoing system of people and practices within which the program is to be implemented. This common problem of not planning comprehensively gives the sense of

multiple and conflicting programs in which the parts do not add up to an effective whole that can improve achievement and equity.

The other side of the challenge of not planning comprehensively is failing to follow through in detail on the plans. Some Consortium schools have articulated a vision and specific goals regarding the improvement of equity and achievement, and yet they struggle to implement practices and strategies to realize that vision. The work that they do is almost always systemic—it is connected to their vision and it is comprehensive. The problem is that they have trouble taking the steps to actually make things happen. Schools that experience this challenge often identify this as a problem of "communication" or "decision-making." This leads them into a cycle of tightening lines of communication or creating stricter rules regarding who makes what decisions. While some of this work may be helpful, schools often lose sight of the larger picture, focusing on new policies and procedures as the ends rather than the means to effective implementation.

One HPLC Consortium elementary school, for example, while quite skilled at finding and creating new ideas that could address their equity and achievement challenges, frequently ran into problems when it came to following through on their ideas. During a two-day site visit, our HPLC coach attended the monthly meeting of the school's Teacher Leadership Team (TLT)—a team that includes a representative from each grade level. At this meeting, the team discussed two items that they agreed to follow up on during the next meeting. The first item had to do with professional development. The whole staff had agreed on the need to engage in professional development to build staff capacity to improve literacy. A member of the TLT had researched different options, and presented the TLT with descriptions of the two that she felt would be the most effective, given the school's unique context and literacy challenges. The TLT representatives agreed to share these two options with their grade level teams and collect their feedback regarding their preferred option. Since the monies designated for this professional development needed to be spent within the following six weeks, the TLT agreed to make a decision, informed by the feedback from the grade-level teams, at the next TLT meeting.

The second item had to do with creating more time for teachers to collaborate with their grade level teams to plan curriculum and to develop effective supports for students who were performing at low levels. This had been an ongoing issue at the school, and one of the teachers who co-facilitated the TLT meetings had recently attended an education conference where she learned of a creative approach to building in time for teacher collaboration. She shared this idea, the TLT liked it, and each representative agreed to discuss it with her grade level team. The Team also agreed to return to the next meeting with feedback and other suggestions.

The HPLC coach scheduled her next visit to coincide with the next Teacher Leadership Team meeting. She first met with two teachers who were to co-facilitate the TLT meeting that would take place later that afternoon. The coach noticed that the items the Team had identified as needing follow-up at the next meeting were not on the agenda that the co-facilitators had planned. She asked them, "Is there an update regarding the options for professional development?" The teachers responded that they had not really followed up, except that during a recent meeting at the district, they were encouraged to look into a different option entirely. The coach continued to probe, "So what's the next step with this? Is there a check-in about this to be done at the meeting today? How will you decide which option to pursue?" The teachers gradually understood the point of the coach's questions. They decided to bring this matter up at the TLT meeting and acknowledge that more follow-up was needed. However, they did not think that it would be realistic for grade-level teams to provide as much input into the

final decision as they had originally hoped, given the timeline for making their decision.

The HPLC coach then asked about the follow-up regarding increased time for teacher collaboration. One of the teachers said that she had a hunch that no one had done anything about this since the last meeting, and therefore, there was no need to check-in regarding this issue. The coach asked her what her plan was, then, with regard to this issue. She explained that she was just going to let it go; she added that she really didn't know how to follow-up on this item. The coach suggested that they do the check-in at the meeting to establish a pattern of follow-up and consistency; if in fact no one had done anything since the last meeting, then they (as a Team) needed to clarify the task and either agree to do it or agree to let it go. Either way, they needed to be explicit about their choice. The teachers agreed to try this approach.

This example presents a rather simplified picture of how schools struggle to follow-through on their plans. This pattern manifests itself in more complex ways, but the consequences are the same. Without consistent attention to systemic and detailed plans, changes are inconsistently implemented and comprehensive reform does not happen. Thus, the seemingly "simple" act of following through on plans and commitments is a key element of the complex work of implementation.

Challenge 3: Providing Support and On-going Professional Development

Implementing complex change requires that those responsible for making change happen—whether in the classroom or at school level—receive ongoing support to develop new knowledge, skills, habits, and practices.

For example, through its participation in several reform networks, one Consortium high school had developed an understanding of what it means to think comprehensively about its efforts to improve student learning and achievement. The school team had identified teacher action-research as one strategy that would engage the entire staff in the process of continuous inquiry and improvement.

In the fall of 1998, the school's leadership team developed a comprehensive plan for implementing teacher action-research schoolwide. The first part of this plan included the formation of an Action-Research Team with a representative from each academic department. At the leadership team's request, school coaches met with the Action-Research Team to provide them with training regarding the purposes, processes, and "steps" of action-research. The coaches also facilitated the Team's co-construction of the specific purposes of action-research in the school's context.

After two meetings, the Team members reported back to their academic departments and worked with them to identify specific questions that they wanted to investigate in order to understand the relationship between their practices and student achievement. During this time, the HPLC coach also worked with the school leadership team to develop a plan for connecting the various action research projects to the school's overall effort to improve equity and achievement. The plan included strategies for providing ongoing support and training to teachers as they progressed in their action-research projects. And yet, the necessary support and ongoing professional development was not included in the plan's actual implementation. Why not?

One department did not understand what they were "expected" to do or produce. The department's Action-Research Team representative did not feel knowledgeable enough to answer her colleagues' questions, nor did she know who to go to for support or guidance. Even worse, this department began to receive direct and indirect messages from colleagues in other departments that they were "doing it wrong" and that they were not making the kind of progress that they needed to make.

At one point, one teacher from this department contacted the HPLC coach. She asked her to attend their department meeting to help them understand what they should be doing. The coach did meet with the team, during which time the team expressed their profound frustration with the school's approach to implementing the strategy of action-research. The coach provided the team with some direct instruction and sharing of tools that could help them begin their action-research work. The department indicated that they appreciated the coach's time and felt that they had developed an understanding of what they could do to engage in action research. However, they were not sure that they would be able to overcome their frustration with their colleagues for "setting them up."

In summary, the ongoing support and professional development that had been discussed in the plan was not provided in actual practice. As a result, the "strategy" of action-research was inconsistently implemented. Some teachers engaged in the work as it was designed. Others engaged in what they thought of as action-research, though it differed from what the Action-Research Team had conceptualized. And others struggled to overcome their frustration at not being provided sufficient support or training. This is an example of how effective implementation can be disabled when there is insufficient support and professional development.

Challenge 4: Adapting to Fit the Context

The purpose of school reform is to replace some structures, programs, and/or practices with "better ones"—ones that more effectively help schools accomplish their equity and achievement goals (Fullan, 1991). Therefore, an essential element of implementation is the act of actually doing something differently. In the complex context of schooling, "doing" something involves continuously negotiating and adapting an idea or a practice within the school's context. It necessitates a process of mutual adaptation through which both the school and the strategy being implemented are changed in some way (Berman & McLaughlin, 1979).

Some schools have trouble making even small changes happen, but most schools in the HPLC Consortium were excellent at handling the routine details of carrying out externally mandated change. For example, most California schools responded efficiently to the programmatic and logistical work that was required of them following the passage of Proposition 227, which mandated regulations concerning limitations on the use of native language instruction. Similarly, Consortium schools in Oregon managed relatively smooth compliance with statewide standardized testing requirements and other centralized accountability processes.

The challenge comes when we look beneath the surface of these seemingly routine executions of state, district or external policies. We often see teachers engaged in "compliance" behavior. Compliance behavior is much more of a process of "going through the motions" or "adding on" to existing work rather than making the new practice meaningful by integrating it into the core of the school or classroom practices. Therefore, implementation is symbolic, and does not penetrate teaching and learning.

We have worked with schools in the HPLC Consortium to change their culture and habits of mind so that they can turn "lemons into lemonade" by using the necessity of external mandates as an opportunity for genuine improvement. This requires that they adapt and integrate external policies (as well as new ideas and resources) in meaningful ways within the school's unique context. When schools see implementation as adaptation, they have the opportunity to work with a new policy but tailor the implementation to maximize its benefit for their students.

The same need to adapt applies to imported comprehensive reform models or specific content programs (e.g., a literacy program) as well as to

externally mandated policies. For these models and programs to truly affect student learning across the whole school, they need to be adapted during implementation to fit the school's context.

Challenge 5: Evaluating and Cycling Back During Implementation

Effective implementation entails adaptation over time. Since reforms evolve as they are being implemented, they can wander off track and not be effective either for student performance or for staff development. Yet, we observed many instances where mid-course corrections and refinements were made to realize the full benefit of the improvement. On the other hand, we have seen programs that have little impact continued without evaluation as well as programs cut off before they have had a chance to be fully implemented. Absent of evaluation during implementation, meaningful adjustments that affect the whole school may not be made.

In meetings three times a year and in on site coaching, the HPLC Project focuses on helping schools learn to use data for evaluation. Our goal is for schools to "collect and use data as part of the life of the school. … Data inform decisions, are the basis for action plans, and guide the refinement of programs and practice so that student achievement and equity can be realized" (Olsen, 1998). We use a procedure called *data-based inquiry* to integrate the use of data into formative evaluation.

For example, one Consortium elementary school recently spent their staff meeting time reflecting on the data that HPLC Project researchers collected about the school's progress toward becoming a high performing school.[2] The school had been focusing on goals of improving curriculum, instruction, and student support in order to increase student literacy. After reviewing standardized reading and writing assessment data to evaluate their progress toward reaching their quantifiable goals of improved reading and writing, the staff turned to the data about their school operations to prompt further reflection and analysis of the school's process of improving literacy. After reading the researchers' findings, the teachers engaged in further reflection and discussion. One teacher stated, "we need a more systematic approach to assessing and responding to students' special needs." Another commented, "We don't give students specific help for their specific needs. What about those whose needs haven't even been identified?" And yet another asked, "We may be culturally responsive to students by matching the curriculum to their culture, but are we doing that too much? Are we creating a bubble for them that is not helping them with their language and literacy needs?" These issues were central to the school's effort to reach its goals. The process of evaluating the success of their current efforts enabled the staff to re-evaluate their strategies and channel the implementation of their literacy program into deeper, more systemic, and more beneficial directions.

We have found it to be helpful to Consortium schools to conceptualize the cycle of evaluation as two interrelated cycles: evaluation of *implementation* and evaluation of *impact*. The first cycle focuses on the actual process of implementation: in order to implement a particular strategy effectively, schools must always be in the process of assessing the degree to which they have sufficiently addressed each of the elements of implementation with regard to that strategy.

The second cycle includes ongoing reflection regarding the impact on student learning of the strategy being implemented. As schools develop the ability to engage in both of these cycles simultaneously, they are engaging in the dynamic process of implementation. When they are not attending to either cycle in a continuous way, they face many challenges.

For example, one Consortium elementary school had reviewed the actions it had recently taken to implement a particular strategy to improve the learning and achievement of their fourth and fifth grade students. Through this

process, the school discovered that it had not provided teachers with support or professional development to learn how to use the strategy effectively. They also realized that they did not achieve buy-in from everyone that would be impacted by or implicated in the new strategy. The school realized that as implementation continued, it had to cycle back to re-engage the staff in buying in to the strategy. The school now plans to provide teachers with support and professional development so that they may implement the strategy more effectively.

At the same time, the school has been collecting data on the learning and achievement of its fourth and fifth graders. However, the data had not been sufficient to help the staff understand students' strengths and challenges—they needed additional data if they were to understand the ways in which their strategy was supporting their goal. Therefore, as the school continued implementation, it also sharpened its data collection to better understand the relationship between the strategy and student achievement.

Summary

Practitioners trying to implement a change strategy face a number of intertwined challenges, each of which they must address effectively. These essential challenges are: getting buy-in; planning comprehensively with detailed follow-through; providing on-going support and professional development; translating and adapting the reform into practice; and, evaluating and continuously cycling back to each challenge to adjust the school's strategy. When we conduct research on how schools fail to implement whole-school reform, we can focus on each of these elements and identify factors that may have caused the breakdown. Similarly, from an action perspective, the HPLC Project has designed support activities to assist schools in addressing each element of implementation.

The next section identifies skills and habits of mind for effective implementation. Section IV describes the HPLC support strategies aimed at helping schools develop these skills and habits of mind.

III. Implementation Capacity

The previous section described implementation challenges faced by schools undertaking comprehensive reform. It illustrated how some schools have struggled to overcome these issues, whereas as others have managed to get buy-in, plan comprehensively with detailed follow-through, provide on-going support and professional development, translate and adapt the reform into practice, evaluate the accomplishment of goals and process, and cycle back. The latter group of schools *consistently* implemented change effectively, even under such trying external conditions as a change in a principal or the imposition of a new state law. They have the "know-how." They have a capacity as an organization to implement change effectively. Such *implementation capacity* is a defining characteristic of continuously improving schools that we call High Performance Learning Communities.

What knowledge, skills, habits of mind, organizational culture, and organizational conditions constitute implementation capacity? And how might these attributes be developed and sustained in schools that do not yet have a high degree of implementation capacity? This chapter addresses the first question. The next chapter, entitled Building Implementation Capacity, describes how the HPLC Project is working with the Consortium schools to attend to the second question.

We think of a school's implementation capacity as composed of (1) the ability of individuals within the school community to effectively respond to the five essential implementation challenges identified in the preceding section, and (2) the organizational culture and practices that support the individuals to be effective. Thus, in addition to examining individual attributes that contribute to a person or a team of people being able to effectively implement a strategy, this section explores the organizational qualities of implementation capacity.

Attributes of Implementation "Know-how"

We have observed individuals within Consortium schools who consistently demonstrate they are capable of engaging in effective implementation. They seem to know how to get the job done. Upon closer examination, we found that these individuals share a particular set of attributes that help them negotiate the dynamics of implementation. We use the term *implementation know-how* as a short hand for the skills, habits of mind, and abilities that individual implementers possess or learn—often by hard experience—as they become effective implementers. What are the attributes of implementation know-how?

At one level, individuals that engage in effective implementation have knowledge and understanding that many of their colleagues lack. They understand how implementation works (albeit often intuitively) and they know the reality, constraints, and possibilities inherent in their school and its context. In general, they know and understand:

- the essential elements of implementation (as described in the preceding section);
- who lives and works within the school community—they know who their constituents are, they know the different groups that make up the school community, and they know the concerns, priorities, and interests of these groups;
- how language, race, culture, and socio-economic conditions function in the context of learning;
- how their school operates as an organization and system;
- how their school operates as part of a larger

organization and system;

- the "non-negotiables" of schooling (e.g., union rules, laws pertaining to what the school can and cannot do); and
- the interplay between issues of teaching and learning and school, district, and community politics.

In addition, individuals with implementation know-how demonstrate skills they developed the hard way— in the course of implementing various programs, change efforts, or policy decisions. They were rarely "taught" these skills, but acquired them through a process of trial and error. The most important skills are the ability to:

- plan, facilitate, and/or actively participate in meetings;
- lead and/or participate as a team member in data-based inquiry;
- facilitate and/or actively participate in negotiating or co-constructing ideas;
- develop an action plan, including specific tasks, milestones and timelines;
- develop an evaluation plan;
- work effectively with many different personalities/roles/etc. to build consensus; and,
- collect, analyze, and/or engage others in making meaning of aggregated and disaggregated data.

In addition, individuals with implementation know-how have habits of mind that facilitate interpersonal interactions. They habitually:

- clarify the relationship between data, ideas, actions, and goals;
- move themselves and others forward when they are "bogged down" or "stuck";
- check in with others regarding their needs;
- actively listen to and learn from others;
- honor diverse perspectives and experiences and consider different points of view;
- exercise patience with others and with themselves;
- expect themselves and others to be human— which includes grieving and celebrating; and
- advocate tirelessly for students and their families, connecting everything that they do to the improvement of equity and achievement.

Finally, individuals with implementation "know-how" consistently integrate their knowledge, skills, and habits and has agility to adapt their responses to different situations.

From Individual Know-How to System Capacity

One effective implementer in a school may be sufficient to push through a new policy or program, but it generally is not enough for the school to have a high and sustainable implementation capacity. This situation describes several schools in the HPLC Consortium. When the effective individual—usually the principal—left these schools, the schools drifted and were unable to get things done.

We found that in order for schools to implement complex change effectively and consistently it is necessary for them to have a *critical mass* of effective implementers among members of the school community. The critical mass is not an absolute number of people, but varies according to local realities. Which and how many members of the school community (e.g., the principal, teachers, outside support providers, students, parents, school board members, others) constitutes a critical mass depends very much on the context of the school. Suffice it to say that schools with a high level of implementation capacity have a critical mass of effective implementers.

Not just one leader, but the critical mass makes things happen in High Performance Learning Communities. As a group, they are in the habit of "experiencing and thinking abut educational change processes as an overlapping series of dynamically complex phenomena" (Fullan, 1991, p. 21). When we have looked at the broad patterns of how these schools work, we have observed that the interactions among people and teams become habitual in advancing the larger vision and goals—excellence and equity—of the schools. Based upon our findings in Consortium schools as well as the findings derived from case studies of other schools engaged in reform (e.g., Geiser, 1996; Rose, 1995), we codified the dynamics associated with high implementation capacity in the form of a heuristic. This heuristic simultaneously reflects four dynamics that a school must manage in the course of effective implementation:

- maintaining focus *while* being adaptable and responsive;
- achieving clarity *while* tolerating confusion;
- understanding reality *while* imagining other possibilities; and
- thinking systemically *while* acting specifically.

Each dynamic has two critical elements that must be brought into balance in the practical situation of implementation. Balancing is the art of implementation. Consider the first dynamic, for example. Schools typically try many reforms and react to wave after wave of fads and changing policies. They have a fundamental challenge of maintaining focus, otherwise they cannot implement systemic change. But here is the irony. Maintaining focus is necessary, not sufficient. It can inhibit the essentially adaptive process of implementation. Without adaptation, the goals of the strategy being implemented are unlikely to be reached. Thus, the effective school learns to balance the pulls between the need to maintain focus and the need to adapt.

The critical mass of implementers at a school has to make a series of judgements that balance one element against the other. While many schools may be good at one element, they are often not skilled at managing both aspects simultaneously. Why are the four dynamics essential to implementation capacity? How do schools develop the ability to balance these elements of effective implementation?

Maintaining Focus *while* being Adaptable and Responsive. There are many models for managing organizational change that emphasize the importance of aligning an organization's actions, decisions, and priorities with its goals. This paradigm is embedded within approaches to school change that emphasize the importance of setting measurable goals, using data to monitor progress toward those goals, and using the teachings from such analyses to guide a school's choices regarding the modification of its actions (Olsen, 1998; Schmoker, 1996). The ability to sustain an organizational focus on equity and achievement outcomes is a critical capacity for schools to develop if they are to engage in continuous improvement.

However, in their efforts to develop a "focus," we have observed several Consortium schools cling to a program for achieving a goal rather than focus on the measurable *goal* that the program was intended to achieve. Holding fast to the particulars of a program, these schools missed indicators that the program was not improving student learning and achievement. Furthermore, this attachment to a program tended to block the school from being aware of how changes in context (e.g., student population, accountability requirements, staff turnover) might have made other strategies more effective. Consequently, the capacity to *focus* also has the potential to limit a school's ability to respond effectively and with agility to certain changes.

On the other hand, we have also seen schools that were so adept at shifting gears in order to respond or react to changing conditions that they cannot sustain a focus. These schools

applied for multiple grants, initiated and terminated numerous programs, and even changed their schedules or school calendars to accommodate different "needs"—but they made these changes without understanding the relationship between their action(s) and their goal(s). We have also seen this drift occur in contexts where frequent turnover in school and/or district leadership prevents a school from identifying or maintaining its direction and feeling secure about moving forward. In these cases, the school is not able to focus on any one thing long enough to create consistent movement toward change. This, too, is problematic.

Achieving a balance within these competing pulls means that schools have the ability to respond to changes in ways that sustain their progress toward accomplishing their equity and achievement goals.

Achieving Clarity *while* Tolerating Confusion. Confusion before clarification characterized much of the reform work at Consortium schools—particularly within contexts where co-construction of ideas was valued and pursued. A school that is engaged in continuous improvement is engaged in a process of renewing itself in order to attain goals. In this process, educators discover the ways that their existing framework and discourse of schooling makes it difficult to talk in new ways about equity and achievement (Geiser, 1996, 1997). Consequently, the task of developing clarity around a school's vision and plan for improving equity and achievement often involves "testing" new ideas and the comprehensibility of new assumptions and models. This work involves "breakthroughs" in understanding, which, according to Gardner (1993), are periods of great confusion. Therefore, in their continuous pursuit of clarity, schools need to expect confusion.

Saul (1992) suggests that individuals should actually attempt to increase confusion by "asking uncomfortable questions until the source of the difficulties is exposed" (p. 535). Could a setting that actually appears to increase confusion provide an appropriate context for productive change? Our research in Consortium schools suggests that asking questions that appear to increase confusion can ultimately enable educators to recognize where they agree; this allows them to grapple with the deeper issues of their practice (see also Geiser, 1996).

At one Consortium middle school, the HPLC data-based inquiry resulted in a series of staff meetings with an outside facilitator to help the entire staff explore the relationship between race, racism, and achievement gaps between different groups of students. While these conversations included moments of confusion, disagreement, and conflict, they ultimately generated new understanding and awareness about why groups of students are persistently underachieving. They also opened the door for whole staff dialogues that had not happened for a several years.

Other Consortium schools were thrown into confusion when they—or we—questioned philosophies they have held as "givens." For example, one Consortium high school had assumed "equity" meant that every student received the "same" treatment. Several staff resisted questioning this "fact." They found the conversation confusing, and felt it was preventing them from doing the "real work" of improving learning and achievement. By questioning this definition, however, the staff was able to develop clearer goals regarding student achievement; they were also able to see other ways of supporting students to achieve at high levels—ways that necessitated "different" treatments.

Achieving a balance between clarity and confusion requires that schools create time and space for members of the school community to surface questions and assumptions. Exposing confusion and differences permits increased clarification and understanding which ultimately provides students with a more coherent experience—and an increased opportunity for success.

Understanding Reality *while* Imagining Other Possibilities. If schools serving low-income students are to make changes that improve student outcomes, then the members of the school community need to be able to:

- have a clear understanding of which students are achieving at which levels and in what areas in order to understand their equity and achievement challenges, *and*
- imagine that things can be otherwise—imagine what it would look like if all students were learning at high levels and the patterns of achievement were equitable.

Many Consortium schools had incomplete or inaccurate perceptions of student learning and achievement at their schools. With only a general sense of the school's strengths and challenges (e.g., behavior seems to be improving; test scores are going down), educators cannot identify what their students need to be more successful. Consequently, they cannot conceive of what their role could be in improving student learning and achievement. In the absence of this understanding, educators in many Consortium schools had come to see certain levels or patterns of low achievement as inevitable. They also accepted certain conditions as "givens." These habits of mind limited the number of "variables" that could be manipulated to improve achievement. In fact, much of what is defined as a "given" are conditions or assumptions that can be changed—and may even be levers for affecting comprehensive change. These "fixed" variables are often the key to new possibilities.

For example, at one Consortium middle school, the HPLC coach observed early on that there were differing realities in the school's data. Internal measures (e.g., grades, reading and writing assessments) showed students doing very well, but external measures (e.g., standardized tests) showed them doing poorly (e.g., performing at the 20^{th}-26^{th} percentile) over many years. At about that same time, the District published a scathing report of the school's work, proclaiming publicly that the school was not doing anything to raise student achievement and that some students were losing ground, according to external measures.

The HPLC coach engaged a team of teachers in a process of HPLC data-based inquiry, which allowed the team to be self-reflective about their roles, the school's role in student achievement, and the myth of excellence that persisted at the school. The process also challenged their assumption that the school could not do anything to change the data. The team concluded that it needed to share the data with their colleagues.

The coach worked with the team to plan and facilitate a two-day intensive retreat for the school's leadership teams and administrators. Those who participated in this retreat wanted the whole staff, including classified staff, to have a similar experience, and so a second retreat occurred with the entire staff. The coach noted that at each retreat the staff,

> "started with the same raw data set and let people build meaning from the data. We facilitated, and by the time we had the staff retreat with 70+ staff, there were about 20 people who were able to help with facilitation. It was an enormously powerful experience for the school. They came to a sense of yes, we have a student achievement problem that *we* can do something about."

The retreats enabled the school staff to create a school-wide understanding of the reality at their school, and allowed them to develop a sense that it could be otherwise. But although the school had made great progress, they still were not at the point of thinking about what it would look like if more of their students were achieving at higher levels.

Later, the HPLC coach worked with another team of teachers at the school. The teachers knew that only 5% of their students were tested as prepared for algebra. They acknowledged that

this was an achievement problem. Yet they assumed that if they raised their expectations of students, then every child would not reach them—in fact, they assumed that every child *could not* reach them. This assumption prevented them from setting higher expectations. Instead, they focused on trying to get their lowest performing students to a passing level in math. This did not address the low numbers of students who were ready for algebra. The school coach asked them, "What if you worked to get the students who are currently earning Cs and Ds (e.g., not the absolute lowest achieving students) ready for algebra?" They could not even imagine that. The coach went on, "What if we set a goal of 100 students for algebra readiness, and the next year 150?" She could feel them cringing. It took several more conversations —and exposure to examples of schools that had higher rates of algebra readiness— for this school to develop concrete images of what it would look like for more students to achieve algebra readiness.

By holding images of what *is* as well as what *can be*, schools can become poised to find or create effective responses to their equity and achievement challenges. They are more able to see familiar challenges in new ways and to combine elements of familiar strategies in ways that improve equity and achievement (Geiser, 1996).

Thinking Systemically *while* Acting Specifically. High performing schools are strikingly different from ordinary schools in that they operate as *outcome-oriented systems* working "across a number of crucial dimensions that all directly or indirectly affect student learning"— (Berman et al, 1998, p. 5). Many theories conceptualize organizations as ecological systems consisting of numerous interdependent parts (Fullan, 1993; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Sarason, 1990). This systems framework emphasizes a crucial aspect of implementation capacity. Schools need to sustain attention on interdependence as they plan and carry out specific actions that affect any one element of the system (Bateson, 1989). The balance between thinking systemically while acting specifically is particularly difficult to achieve in the context of schools—a context designed to serve multiple, and often contradictory, purposes.

When the Project began, one Consortium school was already engaged in a struggle regarding implementation. The school deeply honored its students' home culture and primary language. The school had an explicit commitment to support all students to achieve biliteracy. A rich bilingual program emerged from this commitment. And yet, confronted with data revealing that their English Language Learner (ELL) students were not developing sufficient English literacy skills, the teachers realized that they needed to make some changes in order to better support students' English language development. They understood the "big picture." And they understood that the school needed to function as a comprehensive system to improve student literacy.

The school has developed several plans for improvement, beginning with a vision statement regarding biliteracy and including specific, measurable goals for gains in Spanish and English language development as determined by multiple measures of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, the teachers have had difficulty articulating specific steps that they will need to take to achieve improved English language development (e.g., increasing the amount of time that English is the language of instruction). When they are working at this level of specificity, they worry that they are focusing on English language development *at the expense of* Spanish language development. This felt conflict brings with it a myriad of powerful emotions and reactions (e.g., betrayal, "selling out"). It has become a struggle that threatens their ability to implement change in their practice.

In this example, the school is able to think systemically, but it is challenged to act specifically. Through ongoing HPLC coaching support and by developing increased capacity to create action plans, the school has implemented several strategies to support English language development. Data indicate that more students are now transitioning successfully to English instruction. This evidence of progress helps the staff feel more confident that their specific actions are in fact supportive of their larger goals; it is helping them to attain a balance between thinking systemically and acting specifically.

Organizational Culture and Conditions that Support Implementation Capacity

In order to develop and sustain implementation capacity, schools require an organizational culture that helps all members of the school community develop implementation know-how and enables effective implementers to do their work. In addition, schools with high implementation capacity create the organizational conditions (e.g., use of time and resources) to facilitate the implementation of reform and build implementation capacity. What school culture and conditions contribute to implementation capacity? The answer turns out to be both surprisingly complicated and amazingly simple.

Generally speaking, schools require an organizational environment that is both a "learning community" and has a "supportive structure" that creates the time and resources to enable the learning community to function effectively. It has what might be called an *infrastructure that supports implementation capacity and continuous improvement.* When we catalogue the elements of this infrastructure, we find that though many elements must be listed, these elements are precisely those that are captured by the Principles of High Performance Learning Communities (for a description see Berman, Kamprath, Perry, & Wood, 2000). In other words, schools that are High Performance Learning Communities tend to have a high implementation capacity—and vice versa.

When the HPLC Project works on building implementation capacity at schools, our support activities have three simultaneous aims:

- to assist the schools in addressing their specific implementation challenges;
- to help a critical mass of individuals within the school community develop implementation know-how; and
- to support schools in developing and sustaining the elements of learning communities and an organizational structure that supports the school's implementation capacity.

The next section describes these support activities.

IV. Building Implementation Capacity: Support Activities and Tools

Building a school's capacity to implement comprehensive reform is a key aspect of creating and sustaining a self-renewing system that has high levels of excellence and equity. The preceding sections identified the essential elements (challenges) of implementation, the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind of implementation know-how, and the critical components of implementation capacity. Based on these research findings, the HPLC Project has developed support activities to assist schools in the Consortium as they tackle their specific implementation challenges, to help them develop implementation know-how, and to build their implementation capacity.

The support activities are of two types. The first type is general (or *generic*) learning activities all Consortium members are exposed to in the HPLC Project's three Consortium meetings per year. For these meetings, we have developed a variety of learning and planning tools for practitioners. This section discusses the tools most relevant to building implementation capacity, and illustrates how we infuse "what" we want schools to learn about implementation into these tools.

The second type of support is HPLC coaching, which is *context-based* in that it is specific to the school. In effect, the coaching, as well as school-to-school practitioner visits, applies the general learning activities from the Consortium meetings to the needs and reality of each school. We believe that the combination of the general (or generic) and the specific (or context-based) application reinforces learning and therefore accelerates the building of implementation capacity (Berman, Fields-Tyler, & Thorp, 1999). This section will illustrate how we go from generic to specific, context-based support and what tools support the learning process.

Overview of the HPLC Theory of Action

The HPLC Project co-developed research-based Principles of High Performance Learning Communities to provide schools with general goals for whole-school reform. The schools can use these Principles as a framework to guide their choices of specific curriculum, instruction, and other strategies and measure the results in terms of student achievement and equity.

We have found that the schools need to learn six essential skills and habits of mind if they are to become High Performance Learning Communities. The six are listed in the first column of Table 1. The focus on building implementation capacity, the subject of this report, is the fifth essential skill listed in the table. The Project has developed a scaffold of support strategies to assist schools in learning these skills, and more generally, becoming a high performing school. The techniques for delivering the support strategies are listed side ways in the table—namely, Consortium meetings, coaching, technical assistance, school-to- school visits, and technology network. The following sections describe support strategies for building implementation capacity using Consortium meetings, coaching, and school-to-school visits. For further discussion of the Project's theory of action and interventions, see Berman, Fields-Tyler, & Thorp, 1999; Berman & Thorp, 1999; Fields-Tyler & Berman, 1999; Fields-Tyler, Thorp, & Berman, 1998.

Consortium Meetings: An Example of Generic Support for Building Implementation Capacity

Education professionals consistently cite personal and collegial relationships as fundamental to effectively carry out and sustain school reform (Lieberman, 1992). Consortium meetings provide the schools with an opportunity

to develop as a network of peers. At the Consortium meetings, all schools experience processes and are exposed to information that helps them to build their implementation capacity. Consortium meetings also give school teams the opportunity to work with ideas and tools with the guidance of a school coach; this allows the teams to familiarize themselves with the tools and to adapt the tools for use within their schools' unique context.

During the fall 1999 Consortium meeting, the Project launched a year-long process designed to help schools investigate and assess the impact of one of their improvement strategies on achievement and equity. The first step of this process was to help schools evaluate how they had actually implemented their strategy and what impact the implementation had. They were provided with a concrete story of the implementation challenges in an anonymous school (called Walnut Middle School in the materials in Appendix C). During the course of the Consortium meeting, schools were asked to use, in a facilitated process, the following set of HPLC tools to begin to investigate the implementation of their strategy (these tools can be found in Appendix C)[3]:

1. Examining Progress Towards Your HPLC Plan—*an organizing template*
2. Sharing Your Progress With Another School
3. HPLC Framework for Data-Based Inquiry—*a graphic organizer*
4. The HPLC Advanced Data Base Inquiry Process – Part I
5. Strategic Planning and Doing—*an organizing template*
6. Planning for How to Investigate Your Implementation
7. The HPLC Advanced Data Base Inquiry Process – Part II
8. HPLC Data-Based Inquiry "Toolkit"—*list of contents only*

During the first day of the Consortium meeting, the schools began by reviewing their goals for student achievement and equity and

Table 1: Overview of the HPLC Comprehensive Reform Model

	Scaffold of Project Supports				
HPLC Support Strategies ***Building Six Essential Skills and Habits of Mind for Continuous Improvement***	**Consortium meetings**	**Coaching**	**Technical assistance**	**School-to-school visits**	**Technology network**
• Planning for whole-school change based on HPLC Principles	✔	✔	✔		
• Using data-based inquiry in a cycle of school improvement	✔	✔	✔		
• Addressing equity as central to excellence	✔	✔			
• Learning to adopt and adapt strategies that work	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
• Building the know-how to implement change	✔	✔	✔	✔	
• Developing a collaborative infrastructure for continuously improving classroom practice	✔	✔		✔	✔

listing the strategies they were using to achieve these goals. Teams then identified one strategy to investigate and began to consider how to gather data to document and assess how well this strategy was implemented in their school. HPLC provided schools with an "HPLC Data Collection Toolkit" which gave concrete ideas on how to collect some of the data, including surveys, focus groups, and classroom observations. By the end of the session, each school had a concrete plan that outlined their goals, the strategy they planned to investigate, and a plan for gathering data to document their implementation of this strategy.

The Project's purpose for this sequence of "generic" support activities was to help schools make planning and doing more connected to their goals and vision—an essential element of effective implementation. This work also gave schools the opportunity to learn to:

- focus on high-leverage programs, strategies, and interventions and not on current fads or the haphazard accumulation of program after program;
- continually ask what is essential to enable all students to achieve and discipline their thinking, decision-making, planning, and doing to focus on those essentials; and,
- use action-research to measure and understand the degree to which they have implemented a particular strategy.

School Coaching: Working Through a Site-specific Implementation Challenge

Coaches work with schools on a regular basis—at school sites, at HPLC Consortium meetings and institutes, by phone, and by e-mail. While each situation is unique, coaches spend an average of 1-2 days per month at the school, with additional time available for remote support. Working primarily with individuals or leadership teams within the school, coaches provide counsel, questioning, and advice that are *specific* to the context of the school. In this way, coaches are positioned to scaffold a school's learning and development pertaining to implementation within the context of a particular school.

For example, one Consortium comprehensive high school consistently demonstrated that it is capable of making things happen. They successfully and efficiently accomplished significant pieces of work required to be in compliance with the state's new accountability system. Similarly, whenever the school became involved with an outside partner or project, it quickly organized itself to meet the requirements of that work (e.g., it always has created a "team" to attend project meetings). The school was also adept at executing discrete changes initiated by an individual teacher or administrator. For example, when a teacher wanted to start a new course or program at the school, the administration helped to make it happen. Clearly, this school has some implementation skills.

However, the school has struggled more when it comes to identifying its equity and achievement goals and challenges and using those to shape its priorities and "next steps." While the school community has had a shared vision, it has tended to focus on personal responsibility rather than a specific commitment to equity and achievement. The abstract nature of this vision made it difficult for the school to use its vision statement to guide its "next steps" or to assess the relative priority of different innovations. Absent of an explicit focus on achievement and equity, the school's vision also promoted the pursuit of ideas, practices, and policies that may or may not have been linked to improving achievement and equity.

Without these internal mechanisms shaping their reform agenda, the school is engaged in the implementation of new classes, support programs, and other activities without an understanding of why they are doing it or what (in terms of student learning and achievement) they hope to accomplish as a result. Thus, while the school has some skills around

implementation, it does not have the *implementation capacity* that is necessary to develop and sustain itself as a High Performance Learning Community.

According to a previous Project report, "the key responsibility of an HPLC coach is to diagnose what the school needs in order to become an HPLC and to design context-specific, high-leverage strategies to stimulate the school's development" (Berman, Fields-Tyler, & Thorp, 1999, p. 24). In order to address the school's gaps in implementation capacity, the school's coach has spent a great deal of time working with the HPLC team to build its vision and goals regarding the improvement of equity and achievement. She has done this, in part, by working with the team to look at the school's student achievement data to identify the school's equity and achievement challenges. She has also facilitated the team's analysis of data collected through the HPLC Principles Assessment to identify aspects of the school's practices that may not be supporting equity and achievement. Thus, part of this particular school's journey to improve its implementation capacity has included working with the coach to develop the skills of visioning, goal setting, and data analysis.

The HPLC team at this school now recognizes that the school faces significant challenges in implementing strategies that will actually impact students across the whole school. There is also increasing evidence that the school is beginning to develop a vision around serving all students. With the support of its coach, the school is now using the following strategies to engage in effective implementation:

- Staff meetings and/or other opportunities for the whole staff to be together to develop shared meaning (e.g., regarding the school's vision, goals, and/or strategies for reaching its goals);
- Collaborative time to focus on issues that are directly related to teaching and learning; and,
- Sustaining a shared vision and school goals explicitly focused on equity and achievement.

School-to-School Visits: Practitioners Building Each Other's Implementation Capacity

School-to-school visits give Consortium members an opportunity to "see" and learn from practices in operation at other schools. Through these visits, schools have learned how others have successfully implemented practices that improved student learning and achievement; they have also learned how context-specific the work of implementation is.

One Consortium elementary school was in the process of selecting a new math curriculum. After much investigation, the school identified the program that was their first choice. However, before making its final decision, the school sent a team of teachers to visit another elementary school within the Consortium in order to understand the other school's experience with this math curriculum. The host school shared with the visiting school their experiences with the implementation process. They also shared data on students' math achievement as well as samples of student work. The visiting team had the opportunity to observe teachers and students working with the curriculum. Informal conversations, questions, and answers were shared throughout the day, allowing the visiting teachers to understand how this program might work in their school context. The visiting team returned to its school and shared what they had learned with the rest of their colleagues. The school decided to implement this math curriculum the following year. The two schools continue to talk together (e.g., in the context of Consortium meetings, on the phone) to share stories and "advice" with each other regarding the implementation of the curriculum.

The Project stimulated this activity in various Consortium meetings and by providing a *Funding and Planning Tool* for site visits. These

facilitated site visits have enabled schools to engage in effective implementation while building implementation capacity. School-to-school visits have expanded many of the Consortium schools' notions of what is possible, and raised their standard for improved equity and achievement. They now see members of their own school community as "experts" in their own experience—experts who can effectively co-construct challenges and "solutions."

Summary

In the midst of the complex work required of simultaneously running and renewing a school community, educators and leaders in Consortium schools must have a repertoire of skills they can use to make things happen. As Section III described, they must be able to lead, to follow, and to collaborate. They must be able to run an effective meeting and participate meaningfully in a meeting when others are running it. They need to be able to understand who lives and works within their school—and what their interests and priorities are. Each Consortium meeting facilitates processes where the school members can experience and see modeling of the skills necessary for implementation know-how. For example, during the meetings, we have demonstrated strategies for building team effectiveness, strategies for running productive meetings, various "mapping" activities to increase understanding of local context, and tools for examining schools' use of time. While we have focused on issues of "team" effectiveness and understanding the political landscape of the school community during Consortium meetings, it is the school coach who must continually assess and respond to a school's need to attend to some of these "fundamentals" of organizational processes.

V. Conclusion

Comprehensive reform is simply unlikely to take hold on a large scale unless the severe implementation problems encountered in attempting whole-school change can be overcome. The HPLC Project therefore sees building schools' capacity to implement complex change as crucial for reform, particularly for schools in high poverty areas. Accordingly, we have analyzed implementation challenges that schools need to address as they undertake change. We have also examined the skills and habits of mind of school practitioners who have implementation know-how and investigated the organizational culture and conditions that can develop and sustain effective implementation. From this work, the Project has created support strategies (including tools, processes, and materials) aimed at building implementation capacity.

Though it is still early in the process, Consortium schools are showing signs that these strategies have improved their implementation capacity. We see development in three areas observed by HPLC coaches and researchers. The schools also have become conscious of this solid though often subtle building of capacity. We use their comments to summarize this evolution.

1. Schools are understanding the *concept* and *importance* of implementation. Following the fall 1999 Consortium meeting, during which schools engaged with generic and specific interventions to address implementation, participants noted that they "saw how strategic planning will help us meet our goals." Others commented that the sessions on implementation helped them realize that they needed to "focus on the strategies and how we know if we are making a difference." Another participant added that this kind of work "is a necessary step that is often overlooked."

2. Schools are practicing the skills and habits that will build their implementation capacity. While conceptual understanding is important, we know that educators need opportunities to translate concepts and ideas into practice. The Project has developed and shared several tools with Consortium schools that are designed to facilitate this translation. Some of the tools that the project shared with schools were designed to promote reflection on the work that a school had actually done to implement a particular strategy. In response to working with this tool at the fall 1999 Consortium meeting, participants commented:

> "The tool is one we will take back to our group—we must take time to reflect because it helps you see success and the reasons why things have not happened."
>
> "We went through a process that revealed big holes that need to be addressed."
>
> "I learned how to focus on a strategy and follow it through to obtaining the evidence to show what did or did not happen."
>
> "It was specific to a certain work plan, something that we are all working on, something practical."
>
> "This time moved us to be a little more specific about what we're doing to create changes to help us meet an important building goal."
>
> "We made our plan! We have a goal and a target!"
>
> "Our team set good goals and completed much planning for implementing."
>
> "Really gave us a concrete time line of what we need to do and when."

Upon returning to school after the fall meeting, school teams shared their work with their colleagues. At one elementary school, teachers responded: "This is much more specific

and thorough than anything we've done before. We have a reading kit, but if you don't use it right, it won't be effective. If we'd been trained on how to use it rather than simply informed about what is in it, the whole year could have been more effective."

3. Schools are improving their capacity to think and work systemically. Following the fall 1999 Consortium meeting, one participant noted: "Our team has developed more understanding of where we are and where we're headed." During the meeting, another participant, a Middle School Principal, reflected on how the school's involvement in the Project had improved its ability to function as a system: "We have a lot of categorical funding, a lot of grants. There are a lot of pieces that are already functioning at the school. … [HPLC] became the one way that we were able to take all of the different projects and address the interface between all of them. … HPLC became the glue. This was a perfect opportunity to connect all of those pieces."

* * *

This work in the trenches of building implementation is slow but steady, as we have seen. Yet, it sets the stage for lasting whole-school reform that stands a chance of being successful. The Consortium schools have started a process of learning how to implement change—a neglected prerequisite for improving student achievement and equity in schools serving low-income students. The Project efforts to date have shown that deliberate and pragmatic strategies can foster the skills, understandings, habits of mind, and heuristics that makes effective implementation happen.

ENDNOTES

1 Appendix A includes a glossary of the implementation terms used in the text. The glossary identifies implementation as the translation of a reform strategy into reality. People sometimes confuse implementation with exact replication as a cookie-cutter might do. The complex change needed for reform transcends simple cookie-cutter thinking. Thus, we say that implementation "translates" a strategy into reality in order to acknowledge and emphasize that implementation requires a mutual adaptation of the school to the strategy and the strategy to the school.

2 The HPLC Project does yearly assessments of the progress that schools in the HPLC Consortium are making toward realizing the ideals of High Performance Learning Communities. The assessment is called the Principles Assessment. See Berman, Kamprath, Perry, & Wood (2000).

3 While other materials and tools were used at the Consortium meeting, they were not focused specifically on building implementation capacity.

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF IMPLEMENTATION TERMS

Glossary of Implementation Terms

- *Implementation* is the translation of a reform strategy, action, idea, or model into reality.
- *Effective implementation* exists when the translated strategy realizes the goals set out for the reform strategy, action, idea, or model.
- *Implementation capacity* is the capacity of the school to *consistently* implement reform strategies, actions, ideas, or models *effectively*.
- *Implementation know-how* is the skills, understandings, habits of mind, and heuristics that it takes to be an effective implementer.
- *High performance learning communities* have high implementation capacity and are therefore able to achieve equity in student achievement and sustain it at high levels of student performance.

APPENDIX B

THE HPLC SCAFFOLD OF SUPPORT

THE HPLC SCAFFOLD OF SUPPORT

Generic Support

- **Consortium Meetings**

  Education professionals consistently cite personal and collegial relationships as fundamental to effectively carry out and sustain school reform (Lieberman, 1992). Consortium meetings provide the schools with a context in which to develop as a network. At the Consortium meetings, all schools experience processes and information that helps them build their implementation capacity. Consortium meetings also give school teams the opportunity to work with ideas and tools with the guidance of a school coach; this allows the teams to familiarize themselves with the tools and to experience how they might be helpful to them when they return to school.

- **The Technology Network**

  The technology network provides a means of electronic communication that is unstructured and depends on practitioners' interest in exchanging information or ideas. The technology network is designed to allow for direct practitioner contact, discussion forums, and work groups. This provides Consortium members with the opportunity to ask each other questions and share experiences regarding their efforts to implement strategies to improve student learning and achievement.

- **Collaboration between Researchers and Practitioners**

  Project staff and school practitioners are together constructing a shared meaning of HPLC and identifying effective strategies for enabling schools to become HPLCs. The collaboration between researchers and practitioners ensures that the Project's support interventions are constantly informed by the reality of practitioners' efforts to develop and sustain their implementation capacity (Fields-Tyler & Berman, 1999). This collaboration also ensures that the Project's research is shaped by practitioner and researcher expertise.

Context-specific Support

- **School Coaching**

  Coaches work with schools on a regular basis—at school sites, at HPLC Consortium meetings and institutes, by phone, and by email. While each situation is unique, coaches spend an average of 1-2 days per month at the school, with additional time available for remote support. Working primarily with individuals or leadership teams within the school, coaches provide counsel, questioning, and advice that are *specific* to the context of the school. In this way, coaches are positioned to scaffold a school's learning and development pertaining to implementation.

- **School-to-School Visits**

  School-to-school visits give Consortium members an opportunity to "see" and learn from practices in operation at other schools. Through these visits, schools have learned how others have successfully implemented practices that have improved student learning and achievement; they have also learned how context-specific the work of implementation is.

APPENDIX C

TOOLS FOR BUILDING IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY (FROM THE FALL, 1999 HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING)

HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

TOOLS FOR BUILDING IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY

(FROM THE FALL, 1999 HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING)

This Appendix presents tools that focus on building implementation capacity as prepared for the Fall 1999 meeting of the Consortium of High Performance Learning Communities. In the spirit of co-development between Project staff and school practitioners, the tools are working documents that are continuously undergoing revision and are changed over time. The following tools are presented in their entirety in this document except for the DBI Toolkit (this item includes only the table of contents for the DBI Toolkit).

Name of Tool **Page Number**

APPENDIX C1

EXAMINING PROGRESS TOWARDS YOUR HPLC PLAN
HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

EXAMINING PROGRESS TOWARDS YOUR HPLC PLAN

Use your HPLC plan to reflect on the following prompts. Before you begin this activity, revisit your goals for the year.

GOALS: _____

_____

PART I: WHAT HAS YOUR SCHOOL DONE SO FAR TO IMPLEMENT YOUR HPLC PLAN?

What steps have you taken towards implementing your HPLC plan?	*Why have you chosen this step?*	*What happened as a result?*	*How is this step connected to the HPLC DBI cycle?*

HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

PART II. WHAT DID YOU PLAN TO DO AT THE SUMMER INSTITUTE THAT YOU HAVE NOT DONE YET?

Proposed step or activity?	*Reason it has not been done*	*Are we going to drop it or fit it in later?*	*Why?*

HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

PART III. ASSESS THE WORK YOU'VE DONE SO FAR:

- Describe the strengths / successes of the work you've done so far:

- Describe the challenges / weaknesses of the work you've done so far:

- What questions / issues do you want to pursue? What advice do you need?

HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

PART IV. WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING YOUR HPLC PLAN?

What steps do you need to take?	*Who should be involved in this process?*	*What resources need to be allocated? (e.g. time, HPLC funds, materials)*	*Why have you chosen this step?*

☛ **You will be sharing Part I, Part II, and Part IV with another school team. Before you take a break, figure out how your team will do this.**

APPENDIX C2

SHARING YOUR PROGRESS WITH ANOTHER SCHOOL
HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

HPLC CONSORTIUM
FALL MEETING 1999

SHARING YOUR PROGRESS WITH ANOTHER SCHOOL

Directions:

1. Team 1 uses their reflection tool (Part I A and B and Part II of the tool) to answer the prompts below (10 minutes)

2. Team 2 takes notes to track whether the partner school is addressing each question and can adequately describe the work they've done so far

3. Team 2 asks clarifying questions to make sure Team 1 has covered all the questions (e.g. did Team 1 explain why they're doing what they're doing?), and shares feedback and suggestions (10 minutes)

4. Teams switch roles

Each school will need to tell the other school:

1. What are our goals for this year?

2. What have we done to implement our HPLC plan this year? Why?

3. What is our assessment of the work we've done so far?

4. What are we going to do next? Why?

HPLC CONSORTIUM
FALL MEETING 1999

Sharing Progress Towards HPLC Plans

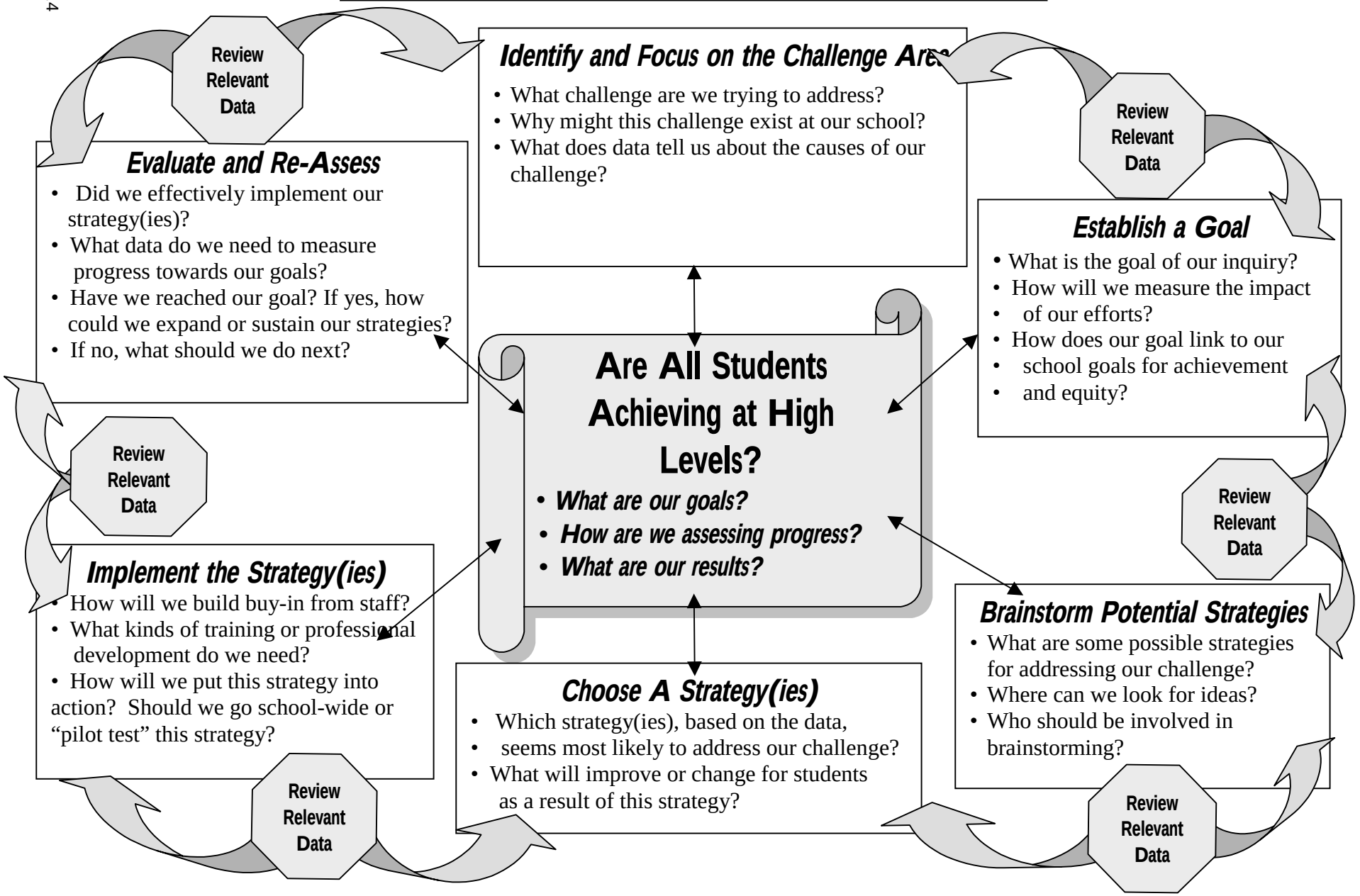
Use this tool to track whether your partner school is adequately describing the work they have done so far.

Question	*Was it answered?*	*Anything missing? Ideas or feedback to share?*
What are the goals for this year?		
What has been done this year to implement the HPLC plan?		
What is the assessment of the work done so far?		
What is going to be done next? Why?		

APPENDIX C3

HPLC FRAMEWORK FOR DATA-BASED INQUIRY
HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

HPLC Framework for Data-Based Inquiry



*Relevant data may include: disaggregated test scores, grades, student work, surveys,classroom observations, research literature, interviews with students, parents or teachers, etc.

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APPENDIX C4

OVERVIEW OF THE HPLC ADVANCED DBI PROCESS
HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

OVERVIEW OF THE HPLC ADVANCED DBI PROCESS

MATERIALS ENCLOSED IN THIS HANDOUT

AT THE FALL MEETING 1999

- ⇨ Naming Goals and Listing Strategies
- ⇨ Choosing a Strategy To Evaluate

FROM THE FALL MEETING 1999 – TO THE SPRING MEETING 2000

- ⇨ Investigating the Implementation of the Strategy

DRAFT MATERIALS IN SECOND HANDOUT

AT THE SPRING MEETING 2000 (MARCH 5-6)

- ⇨ Reviewing Progress on Implementation
- ⇨ Moving towards Assessing the Short Term Impact of the Strategy

FROM MARCH 2000-SUMMER INSTITUTE 2000

- ⇨ Assessing the Short Term Impact of the Strategy

SUMMER INSTITUTE 2000 (JULY 10-14)

- ⇨ Evaluating the Long Term Impact of the Strategy

Naming Goals and Listing Strategies To Evaluate: Introducing Walnut Middle School

This step is a crucial beginning place for assessing both the ***implementation and the impact of your strategies***. While there are many things that your school may be doing to address your goals, it will be important to pick one to investigate. Let's look at a typical school—***"Walnut Middle School"*** - to see how it would work at this school. Walnut Middle School (WMS) has chosen "literacy" as its focus this year and has set goals for raising scores on standardized tests and for improving students' performance on the district writing test. The school is particularly concerned about improving literacy for its African American and Latino students who are overrepresented amongst its lowest performing students, those who are scoring in the first quartile on the state test.

To begin, we'll need to understand more about their strategies and how the school thinks these strategies will help them address their challenges. We could do a table to break this down:

NAMING GOALS: WALNUT MIDDLE SCHOOL

Challenge area: Literacy
Specific Goals:

- Decrease the percentage of students scoring in the first quartile on the state test by 20%
- Lower the achievement gap between African American and Latino and White students on the state standardized test
- Increase the overall percent of students meeting standards on the district writing assessment from 45% to 60%

Focused on Student Learning and/or on Supports for Student Learning

Strategies To Achieve These Goals

What is the Strategy?	What are the Challenges which this strategy will address?	How are these challenges related to Walnut's Goals for Achievement and Equity?
Language Arts teachers teaching reading strategies for 3 hours every week	• Students don't spend enough time reading in school • Students, especially African American and Latino students, need to improve basic literacy skills	If students have basic skills for vocabulary, decoding, etc. they will score better on the standardized test
Parent reading workshops	• Parents don't encourage their children to read at home	If parents know that kids are supposed to be reading, they'll check in with their children and encourage them to read
After school tutoring	• Some students need more time and support time with reading	If we provide extra support to our lowest scoring readers, they will improve their skills and move out of the first quartile
Practice tests in reading and math	• Students don't know how to take the test and become afraid and overwhelmed	If students are familiar with the test format, they will score better

Naming Goals and Listing Strategies To Evaluate: Your School

Based on the above table, you can see that Walnut is still not completely sure how some of its strategies will help the school address its goals. That's probably to be expected—schools do lots of things simultaneously, often without complete clarity about the outcomes. You may find a similar pattern when you fill in the same table below for your school.

NAMING GOALS

Overall Goal:

Specific Goals:

-
-
-
-

Strategies To Achieve These Goals

What is the Strategy?	What are the Challenges which this strategy will address?	How are these challenges related to your school's Goals for Student Achievement?

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Choosing a Strategy To Evaluate: Walnut Middle School

So now Walnut has listed its strategies for addressing literacy and the expected impacts of these strategies, what next? Remember, the goal of this process is to help Walnut know how well its strategies were ***implemented*** so that it can know if these strategies were effective in ***raising student achievement***. So to do this we need to help Walnut choose a strategy to investigate and evaluate. Looking back at the strategies listed, how could they choose just one? Consider these criteria:

- ***Which strategy has the most defined expected outcomes?***
- ***Which strategy seems most closely tied to Walnut's goals for student achievement and equity?***
- ***To which strategy has Walnut been devoting the most time and energy?***

Well, we don't know this school, but let's say the strategy that emerged from this prioritization was, ***"Language Arts teachers teaching reading strategies for 3 hours every week."*** In order to investigate and assess this strategy, we would need to see a full description of the strategy and how it's supposed to be implemented:

Walnut Middle School: Strategy Description

What it is: To improve literacy, our strategy is to increase the amount of time teachers spend teaching reading in Language Arts classes to three hours each week and to train teachers to use specific reading approaches during this time aimed at improving vocabulary, fluency and word recognition.

How we're doing it: To implement this strategy, all staff went through training for one day before school started and were given materials from the district. The Language Arts department then met to discuss how to integrate these approaches. Then, grade level teams at Walnut met to plan for how to integrate these approaches into their curriculum. The district has offered follow up training sessions several times throughout the year.

Choosing a Strategy To Evaluate: Your School

Look back at your table (on p. 3) considering the following prompts:

- ***Which strategy has the most defined expected outcomes?***
- ***Which strategy seems most closely tied to your goals for student achievement and equity?***
- ***To which strategy have you been devoting the most time and energy?***

STRATEGY DESCRIPTION

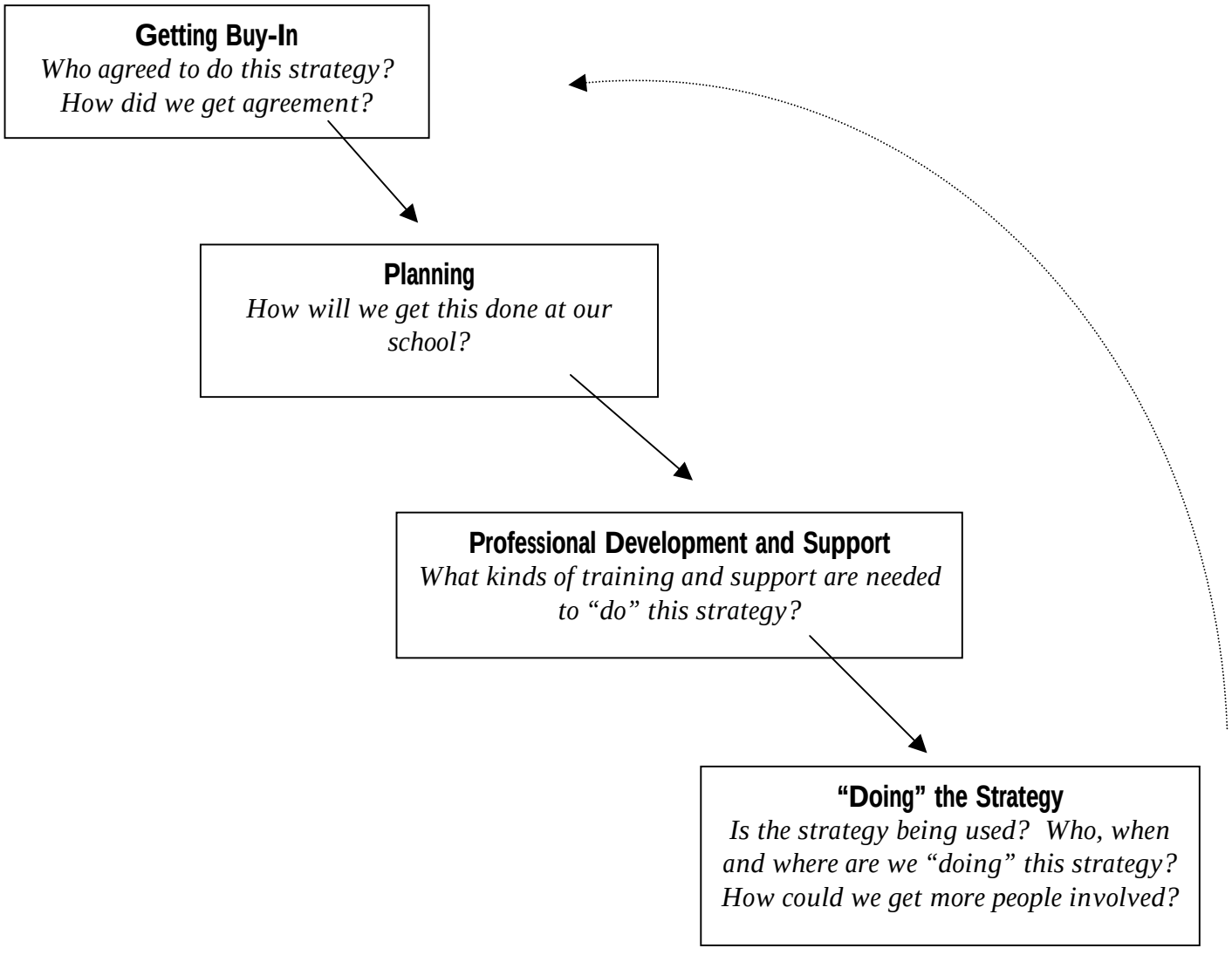
What it is:

How we're doing it:

Investigating the Implementation of A Strategy

Because there can be no impact on student learning unless the strategy is actually implemented, you will need to determine if you are actually **doing** the strategy before you can evaluate its effectiveness. To figure out how to investigate implementation of a strategy, we go back to the components of "strategic planning and doing":

Strategic Planning and Doing



Investigating the Implementation of A Strategy: Walnut Middle School

So now Walnut has chosen the strategy they want to investigate, what next? They will need to collect data to understand:

a) How well they are implementing the strategy
b) If this strategy is improving student learning for all students

Think about how Walnut might investigate how well they addressed these components of "strategic planning and doing" in the implementation of their strategy.

Strategy: Language Arts teachers teach reading strategies for 3 hours every week

Implementation Component	What did Walnut Do?	What data will they collect as Evidence that They Actually Did it?
Building buy-in	• At Walnut we went over data as a staff to understand why literacy is a focus for our school, looked at what we had been doing to teach students reading and decided we needed to increase reading instruction to help students • The district mandated the training in reading approaches so teachers went to it	• Ask a sample of teachers if they understand why they are being asked to use these new reading approaches • Make sure to ask a cross section of teachers who reach all students, especially the targeted groups
Planning	• The principal met with grade level team leaders and discussed how WMS would be helping LA teachers to teach reading for three hours a week using the approaches	• Look to see the agenda and minutes from the meeting--were all grade levels there? • Is there a plan that is being used by teachers and administration to guide this process • Interview team leaders and principal to see if they all know what's supposed to happen
Professional Development and Support	• All staff attended the district training and received materials • District is offering follow up sessions • The Language Arts department met after the training to discuss how to implement these approaches	• Check to see if all staff really attended the training- Who was absent? • Check to see how many people go to the follow up sessions • Talk to Language Arts teachers to find out what happened at the department meeting
"Doing" the Strategy	• Grade levels met to plan how to integrate these approaches • Teachers are supposed to be using these approaches in the classroom	• Shadow students, choosing students of color and white students, to see if teachers are teaching them these approaches • Observe classes randomly to look for evidence that teachers are using these approaches

Investigating the Implementation of Your Strategy: Your School

Now, consider how you will investigate your own implementation process. Remember you are investigating yourselves as teachers as well as your colleagues.

Strategy:

Note…this is not a "check list"—consider each component carefully and resist rushing through!

Strategy Implementation Component	What did (or will) Your School Do?	What data will You collect as Evidence that You Actually Did it?
Building buy-in		
Planning		
Professional Development and Support		
"Doing" the Strategy		

☆ *See the HPLC "Data Toolkit" for ideas about how to collect this evidence…*

APPENDIX C5

PLANNING FOR HOW TO INVESTIGATE YOUR IMPLEMENTATION
HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

HPLC FALL MEETING 1999

PLANNING FOR HOW TO INVESTIGATE YOUR IMPLEMENTATION

OUR GOALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT AND EQUITY:	**THE STRATEGY WE WILL INVESTIGATE:** ***WHAT IT IS***
KEY CHALLENGES WE WANT TO ADDRESS:	***HOW WE ARE DOING IT***

In order to investigate the implementation of this strategy…

Who…	**Will do what…**	**By when…**	**So that we can next do …**	**☆ To assess the Implementation Component…**

☆ *Implementation Components: Getting Buy-In, Planning, Professional Development and Support, "Doing" the Strategy*

Who…	Will do what…	By when…	So that we can next do …	We will know we have succeeded when…

APPENDIX C6

HPLC ADVANCED DBI PROCESS: SPRING –SUMMER 2000
HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

HPLC ADVANCED DBI PROCESS: SPRING –SUMMER 2000 DRAFT MATERIALS

These materials will give you a preview of the process we will use from Spring –Summer 2000 to evaluate the impact of your strategies. We welcome your feedback or input to these tools as we will be revising them before the March meeting…

FROM MARCH 2000-SUMMER INSTITUTE 2000 ⇨ Assessing the Short Term Impact of the Strategy

SUMMER INSTITUTE 2000 (JULY 10-14) ⇨ Evaluating the Long Term Impact of the Strategy

Assessing the Immediate Impact of Your Strategy: Walnut Middle School

Now that you have investigated the implementation of the strategy and the strategy has been in place some time, you can think about assessing its impact. This will involve looking back at the original table to identify the expected outcomes of the strategy and collecting data to see if these outcomes are met.

Remember Walnut Middle School, our "typical" school? At Walnut Middle School, they have been investigating the implementation of a strategy of teaching reading for 3 hours a week using specific approaches. Let's look at the original goals of this strategy:

What is the Strategy?	What are the challenges which this strategy will address?	How are these challenges related to Walnut's Goals for Student Achievement and Equity?
Language Arts teachers teaching reading strategies for 3 hours every week	• *Students don't spend enough time reading* • *Students, especially African American and Latino students, need to improve their basic literacy skills*	*If students have basic skills for vocabulary, decoding, etc. they will score better on the standardized test*

The next step is to investigate that middle column which describes the immediate impact of the strategy. Ultimately, Walnut MS will look at whether or not students score better on the standardized test but those scores will not be available until next summer and we don't want them to wait that long to find out if their strategy worked. Since there are several parts to their strategy, Walnut will need to break it down to consider the intended impacts. The table below shows an example for how they could do this.

What is the Strategy?	How will this Strategy Improve or Change Outcomes for Students?	How will we know if these changes happened? What data could we gather to assess the impact of this strategy?
Teachers instruct students in reading for 3 hours a week using specific approaches for teaching reading	• Increase the amount of time that students spend reading each week Students will improve: • their vocabulary skills • their ability to interpret texts • their reading fluency • their oral language skills	• Select a random group of students and ask them to keep track of how much time they spend on reading each week • Teachers can give vocabulary tests at the beginning of the year and throughout the year to see if students' vocabulary skills increase • Look at data disaggregated to see if all students are increasing their skills • Need to find a reading assessment that would help us know if we raised students' reading ability

Assessing the Immediate Impact of Your Strategy: Your School

How will you assess the impact of your strategy on student learning and achievement?

Remember that while it's good if teacher behavior or practice changed as a result of your strategy, this only matters if you can see the impact of this change for students….

What is the Strategy?	How will this Strategy Improve or Change Outcomes for Students?	☆ How will we know if these changes happened? What data could we gather to assess the impact of this strategy?

☆ ***See the HPLC "Data Toolkit" for ideas about how to collect this evidence…***

If you are like most schools, you may struggle with this last column. You may find that you need new kinds of assessments to really know if your students have improved their learning or increased their skills. Record your reflections here.

NOTES, ISSUES OR NEEDS REGARDING ASSESSMENT AND EVIDENCE:

Evaluating the Long Term Impact of the Strategy: Walnut Middle School

Now you have gathered evidence to see if your strategy had an immediate impact on student learning as measured by classroom assessments and other internal school measures. However, this is only one part of the evaluation of the strategy. You also need to look now at whether this strategy helped your school reach its overall goals, as articulated in your plan last summer. Putting these pieces together forms your school's theory of action. Let's go back to Walnut to see their theory of action…

Walnut Middle School's Theory of Action

What is their strategy?

Require Language Arts teachers to teach 3 hours of reading a week using specific approaches for middle school readers

What are the challenges which this strategy is supposed to address?

- Students don't spend enough time reading
- Students, especially African American and Latino students, need to improve basic literacy skills

How will this Strategy Improve or Change Outcomes for Students?

- Increase the amount of time that students spend reading each week

Students will improve:

- their vocabulary skills
- their ability to interpret texts
- their reading fluency

How will they know if this strategy had long-term impacts?

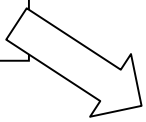
- Look at test scores
- Look at district writing assessment scores

Did they meet their goals for student achievement and equity?

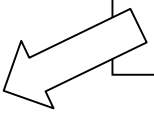
- Decrease the percentage of students scoring in the first quartile on the state test by 20%
- Raise the percent of students scoring at or above grade level by 10%
- Lower the achievement gap between African American and Latino and White students on the state standardized test
- Increase the overall percent of students meeting standards on the district writing assessment from 45% to 60%

Your School's Theory of Action

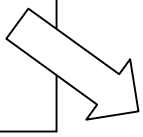
What is your strategy?



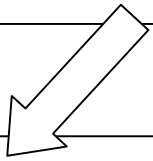
What are the challenges which this strategy is supposed to address?



How Do You Know if Your Strategy Addressed these challenges For All Students?



How will you know if this strategy had long-term impacts?



Did you meet your school goals?

Evaluating the Long Term Impact of Your Strategy: Your School

Reflections on the long-term impact of Your Strategy

1. Did you meet your goals for student achievement?

2. Did you reach your goals for equity?

3. If no, what do you think happened?

a) Go back to the implementation of your strategy…

- Was there adequate buy-in?

- Did teachers get enough training, follow up and support?

- How many teachers ever "did" the strategy? Did time or resources serve as an obstacle to teachers actually doing this?

- Did you as teachers "do" this strategy? Why or why not?

- Did teachers "do" the strategy for all students? Did they focus on the students whose challenges were identified initially?

b) Consider the efficacy of your strategy itself….

- Did you accurately identify the root problems behind your student achievement challenges?

- Are there other factors that might be holding students back from achieving? How will you find out?

c) What other reflections or lessons learned do you have after going through this evaluation process?

APPENDIX C7

HPLC DATA-BASED INQUIRY "TOOLKIT"
HPLC CONSORTIUM MEETING: FALL 1999

HPLC DATA-BASED INQUIRY "TOOLKIT"

Enclosed Are Ideas about:

- ☆ How to choose data collection techniques to match your inquiry and needs
- ☆ Ethics of data-based inquiry
- ☆ How to reach agreement about implementing strategies

Plus specific tools for:

- ✏ Classroom Observations
- ✏ Data "Snapshots"
- ✏ Interviews
- ✏ Shadowing and Observing students
- ✏ Student Focus Groups
- ✏ Surveys

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